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MEDICINE

Scientists Divided on Value Of Paralysis Vaccines

SCIENTIFIC opinion on the value and safety of vaccines for infantile paralysis is sharply divided, it appears from discussions at the meeting of the American Public Health Association, Southern Branch.

Is it safe to inject some of the active, living virus of the disease into a child's body, even if the virus has been weakened so that a larger dose of it does not produce paralysis in monkeys? Does it do any good to inject doses of dead virus?

Parents and physicians all over the country are anxious to know the answers to these questions. So far, scientists have not agreed, and from the discussions it appears that the question cannot be settled without much more extensive researches.

Disappointing results were obtained with the trial of the dead virus vaccine in last summer's epidemic of infantile paralysis in North Carolina and Virginia, because the trial proved nothing either for or against the vaccine.

The North Carolina test was made on 1,452 children, Drs. A. G. Gilliam and R. H. Onstott of the U. S. Public Health Service reported. These children were nearly of the same age, had equal chances of being exposed to the disease, and were children whose parents wanted them vaccinated in order to protect them if possible against the epidemic in the vicinity. They were divided impartially into two groups. All the children in one group, 458, were vaccinated with dead virus vaccine prepared by Drs. William H. Park and Maurice Brodie of the New York City Health Department laboratories. The other children who did not receive the vaccine served as controls, to show whether those protected by the vaccine had any better chance of escaping the disease than those not so protected.

No Cases

"No cases of poliomyelitis were reported in any of the 1,452 candidates and hence no conclusions concerning the efficacy of the vaccine can be reached from this study," Dr. Gilliam said. The study was carried out under the supervision of Dr. J. P. Leake, medical director, U. S. Public Health Service.

It would be necessary to vaccinate 10,000 children and have 10,000 controls

under conditions like those of this particular trial, to show conclusively the value of a perfect vaccine against infantile paralysis, Dr. Gilliam said. If the vaccine were only 80 per cent. effective, a total of 40,000 children would have been necessary.

Further trials of this vaccine are contemplated by Drs. Park and Brodie. Although some scientists hold that dead virus vaccine cannot produce immunity or resistance to infantile paralysis, Drs. Park and Brodie reported they had found "antibodies," substances they believe indicative of immunity, in the blood of children vaccinated by their method.

Living Virus

Another kind of vaccine, made of living virus weakened by chemical and other treatment, has been given to over 10,000 children, Dr. John A. Kolmer, Research Institute of Cutaneous Medicine, Philadelphia, reported. Ten of these children subsequently contracted the disease, five of them dying of it. Dr. Kolmer believes this was because they were already infected before they received the vaccine, and that it was given too late to prevent the onset of the disease. None of these ten children received the full three doses which he considers necessary for full protection.

Other scientists, skeptical of the safety of injecting living virus, see in these ten cases confirmation of their doubts and consider Dr. Kolmer's vaccine unsafe.

Hope that satisfactory vaccine will eventually be developed for protection against virus diseases, such as infantile paralysis, was expressed by Dr. Thomas M. Rivers, Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, New York. Dr. Rivers pointed out the many difficulties in the way of developing such vaccines, difficulties due to the different behavior of viruses and to insufficient understanding of them at present.

Science News Letter, November 30, 1935

Ginger ale and soft drinks that contain caffeine must be plainly so marked, the U. S. Food and Drug Administration has warned manufacturers, citing the wide use of these beverages by children and sick persons who desire a refreshing drink—not a stimulant.